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SUBJECT: FINNAIR CEO CONSIDERS IN-FLIGHT REFUELING FOR
FINNISH F-18S

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Ambassador Ware called on Finnair CEO and President Jukka Hienonen on January 16. Hienonen raised the possibility of Finnair providing in-flight refueling for Finland's F-18 Hornet aircraft and mentioned Finnair's focus on routes to Asia while its North America traffic decreases. Hienonen also commented on the need for the Finnish workforce to adapt to meet the opportunities of globalization. End Summary.

Tanking Up With Finnair? -- Finnair Considers F-18 Refueling Proposal

(SBU) Hienonen said Finnair was considering a proposal from the Finnish Defense Forces (FDF) to acquire several multi-role aircraft that could periodically be leased to the FDF for in-flight refueling of its F-18 Hornet aircraft. Hienonen said the proposal would have to make fundamental business sense to be seriously considered, despite the fact the airline is 55.8 percent owned by the Finnish government. When not in use by the FDF, the aircraft would be used by Finnair on standard routes, possibly to carry cargo. The Finnish press reports that Finnair would acquire two to three multi-role aircraft, likely Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport (MRTT), for in-flight refueling and to transport Finnish forces involved in international peacekeeping or humanitarian efforts.

Flights to Asia Up, Flights to North America Sliding

¶3. (SBU) Hienonen commented on the rapid expansion Finnair is making in Asia, while at the same time stiff competition and transatlantic over-capacity is causing it to significantly reduce its flights to North America. Hienonen said Finland was simply "on the wrong side of Europe" for significant traffic to North America, though it is on the "right side" for flights to Asia. Finnair's focus on Asia has resulted in double-digit yearly growth since 2005.

Finnish Workforce Must Adapt To Globalization

¶4. (SBU) Hienonen noted the need for the Finnish workforce to adapt to meet the opportunities of globalization and that too many Finns were becoming too dependent upon the government for support. Hienonen believes Finland's strong economy has created an environment in which many are "too well off" and hence they are not willing to adapt in the future. Assimilation of new workers in the Finnish workforce was also cited by Hienonen as a challenge Finland will continue to face.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Acquiring an in-flight refueling capability is an interesting consideration for the FDF, as it would provide their military the ability to deploy offensive weaponry (fighters with ground attack capability) beyond Finnish borders, a step that Finland has been resistant to

take in the past. The Finnish F-18 Hornets are already equipped for in-flight refueling; however, access to a standing tanker force would allow for continuous pilot certification and possible international operations in the future. End comment.

WARE